

SENIOR CENTER/COUNCIL ON AGING (COA)

Fiscal Year 2005

PRINCIPAL GOAL: To operate a multi-purpose Senior Center which serves as the community's focal point for the provision of services to the elderly. The Senior Center works to initiate, facilitate, coordinate, and/or provide those services which in the broadest sense enhance dignity, support independence, maintain health, and promote the involvement of Amherst's elderly in the general community.

THE SENIOR CENTER: A VITAL COMMUNITY RESOURCE

Whether it's simply reading our 16-page **bi-monthly newsletter, *THE SENIOR SPIRIT***, or coming in daily for the hot lunch program, Amherst's older residents have come to rely on the Senior Center. Here are examples of some of our program and service offerings in FY 05:

CLINICS: foot care, ear irrigation, acupuncture, massage, blood pressure/glucose screening, hearing aid repair, Reiki, diabetes, meter tune-up days, and free consultations two days a week with an R.N.

CLASSES: computer, defensive driving, literature, crafts, water color/oil painting, strength conditioning, gentle fitness, aerobics, Tai Chi, cooking, financial management, memoir writing, folkdance, Qigong, mah-jongg games, yoga, osteoporosis exercise, the Alexander Technique, focusing

DISCUSSION/SUPPORT GROUPS: current events, New Options, Kindred Spirits (Grandparents as Parents), the Power of Now, "talking books" discussion, caregivers

SOCIAL RECREATION: Musical Showcases, bus/van/air trips, Public Safety picnic, holiday parties and socials, fall bazaar, senior cinema, Thanksgiving dinner, bridge, scrabble, mah-jongg games, grocery bingo, sing-alongs, travelogues

EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS: nutrition, macular degeneration/cataracts, identity theft, home security, organizing, computer privacy, better breathing, the aging eye, Aging is Not a Disease, probate, MoveYour Body from the Inside Out, BC/BS health plan options, reverse mortgages, eating wisely/eating well, hip & knee pain, stress management, estate planning, planning your recovery before surgery, coping with low vision, and

SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS: congregate hot lunch program, Meals on Wheels evening hot supper through UMass, home-delivered hot lunch through HVES, tax assistance, leaf raking, personal care/homemaking referral, friendly visitor program, social worker counseling/I+R, brown bag, food box, free weekly bread/produce giveaway, food pantry, volunteer driving, SHINE health insurance counseling, tax assistance, Tax Work-Off intake, subsidized van ticket sales, farmers' market coupon distribution.

PARTICIPATION IN FREE/LOW COST FOOD PROGRAMS GROWING DRAMATICALLY

We have consistent increases in the number of people taking advantage of our food programs, indicating that larger numbers of retirees are struggling to meet basic needs. Here are figures:

	FY 04	FY 05	
Congregate Meals	5,933	6,467	9% increase
Home Delivered/Meals on Wheels	16,685	17,482	5% increase
Brown Bag	696	735	5% increase
Food Box	298	453	52% increase
Free Bread and Produce Giveaway	2,080	2,543	22% increase
Grocery Walk-ins (Sr.Ctr .food pantry)	29	82	283% increase

Staff have been to every market and bakery in the region to add to the amount of free food we give away every week. Donations of day-old or two-day-old bread, pastry, and produce have become essential to the budgets of increasing numbers of elders. We have had to organize a committee of staff and participants to develop and institute rules to control distribution of the food so as to do this fairly and maintain civility.

VOLUNTEERS

We have calculated that 203 volunteers in FY 05 gave the Senior Center over 11,543 hours, which are valued at \$132,748.14. Besides our community volunteers, there were 53 student volunteers who each gave approximately 30 hours over the academic year. This gift of time does not factor in the value of the other associated donations given, such as gas, food and supplies. With fuel costs spiraling ever higher, we are now seeing many of our 27 unpaid drivers asking for a stipend of some sort to help cover expenses.

TRANSPORTATION

FY 05 did not see a further rise in ticket prices by PVTa, although there were some cutbacks in routes that had low ridership. The Senior Center staff sold 700 books of discounted van tickets, 20 tickets in each book, to 157 elders and 39 people with disabilities in the course of the year. For approximately 40 people, a further discount, amounting to about 8 free tickets a month, was funded partially by a \$1500 contribution from Florence Savings Bank. The impact on staff time from van ticket sales continues to be tremendous.

NURSING CENTER CHANGE

On September 9th, supervisory responsibility for the Senior Center's Nursing Center was transferred to the Amherst Health Department. The Senior Center and Health Department directors and the Town Manager agreed that it would be beneficial to have our nurse be able to take advantage of the medical expertise and collaborative opportunities such a connection could offer. Funding for this program continues to be provided by a generous annual \$10,000 gift from anonymous Amherst donors.

CARING COMMUNITY GRANT

The Kindred Spirits Support Group is a collaborative effort between the Amherst Senior Center, the Northampton Council on Aging, and the Hadley Senior Center, to support relatives who are raising the children of other family members. The group, which is funded by a Title III grant from Highland Valley Elder Services, meets once a month at either the Hadley Senior Center or the Northampton Council on Aging for support, education, socializing and advocacy. It is co-facilitated by the social workers from the Amherst Senior Center and the Northampton Council on Aging.

There are four core members of the group who have been consistently attending meetings this past fiscal year, and within the past two months three new members have begun to attend the meetings. Members, who are grandparents and aunts of the children they are raising, range in age from the mid-fifties to late sixties. The children range in age from 4 to 17, which makes it a challenge for the elderly woman who provides childcare. During the fall semester of 2004, two UMass students assisted with the childcare as part of community service learning for one of their courses. Unfortunately, that did not continue during the spring 2005 semester.

A major change made this fiscal year has been the inclusion of a meal for the group prior to the meeting. This has eased stress for group members, as the meeting time is late afternoon to early evening.

Two group members, recently interviewed by Nick Grabbe, were featured on the front page of the Daily Hampshire Gazette! Members are hoping this article will educate the public and help get the word out about the group.

STAFFING OVERVIEW

For this entire fiscal year, our **Program Director** has served also as our Interim Director. Our **Social Worker**, whose Senior Center responsibility is to oversee the service side of our offerings, has seen a big jump in these demands. She consistently has to put in extra hours to try to cover her work overload. Her salary is partially funded by our \$16,192 formula grant from the state. We have a three-day-a-week **Program Coordinator** on loan to us from Public Works until our regular staff vacancy is filled. Our fourth and final Town-funded position is that of our **Management Assistant**, who also handles the scheduling of three Town buildings in addition to her Senior Center workload.

On a positive note, as of February we now have an Experience Works (formerly Green Thumb) 25-hour-a-week Title V **Meal Site Assistant** to assist our Title III **Meal Site Director**. We have three occasional drivers to drive our 20-passenger van for special trips. Their salaries are funded by monies raised by donations from the community.

CONTINUING ISSUES

Fiscal constraints continue to plague Amherst like nearly all cities and towns in Massachusetts. The Senior Center will now only be able to hire a 4.2 day-a-week Program Director, which had been a full-time position for a very long time. We count ourselves lucky that our activities budget is at least at \$6,500 (in FY 04 it was \$8,000.) There is still no money for training and conferences for our staff; as a result, some Center Activities or Senior Trust monies will have to be used for that. We continue to raise all the money for our bi-monthly newsletter, which costs about \$9,000 a year. It is mailed free to all residents above 59 and to others by subscription. We fund it with ad sales and donations. This is a challenge, as printing and mailing costs are rising.

We are still studying a dilemma regarding **The Senior Trust**, our 501C-3 fund. Its members/directors are also our COA members, and as quasi-Town employees, they cannot continue to manage these public funds. Our options are to put the money in a Town-managed account, form a Friends group, or move the monies into management by a non-profit agency called the Community Foundation. Each of these options has pros and cons and requires careful consideration.

Our COA and staff have started work on **revision of our COA Bylaws**. The Town Manager will now review them and bring them into compliance with the Amherst Town Government Act. They were last revised back in the late 1960s, when there was no staff and all Senior Center activities were run by the COA.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Hirsh Pagano, Interim Director